

PROBLEMS AND CRISES OF DEVELOPMENT 445

phobia, they very often get over the most acute difficulty fairly easily.¹ If they are left to struggle with it themselves, they are often reduced to a general state of disequilibrium.

The same thing applies to the defiant day-time screaming of those children who get into violent tantrums on being thwarted. Some mothers and nurses will not take the least pains to avoid unnecessary situations which throw the child into such violent tempers, and their way of treating the tantrums, when they arise, is either to whip and punish and scold, or to isolate the child. More understanding mothers realise that the child screaming in temper needs the help of a firm but soothing and gentle voice, and that whilst, on the one hand, it is unwise to let the child gain any advantage or power of control over the adult by means of his tantrums, it is, on the other, equally unwise to leave him entirely alone in his enormous stress of feeling and his struggle with inward terrors of attack. He needs the reassurance that his real mother is not going to eat him up or attack him; and this he can only gain by her real presence.

5. SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR

I have already made various incidental points about the wisest attitude with regard to open sexual behaviour amongst children, but must now gather these up more systematically.

I have spoken of the advantage to the educator of realising that such behaviour is not, in itself, unusual or abnormal, especially in the earlier years. But I have also pointed out that flagrant or defiant behaviour of this kind, for example, open and persistent masturbation, or open and apparently unashamed exhibition of sexual parts in public, does point to the fact that the child is suffering from very considerable

mental stress, which he is seeking to allay by this daring and

¹ " You deal this week with a baby suddenly frightened of Ms bath, and as the problem frequently arises, I thought you might be interested to hear my experience. Colin recently took fright at the shadow of the sponge basket (hung in a different place), screamed and tried to get out. For two nights he screamed and would not get in, and I gave him a sponge down instead. Then an experienced mother gave me an idea; we bought a clay pipe and blew bubbles. It worked immediately. The first night, he stood up clutching me while I blew, but soon relaxed his hold in the excitement and let himself be washed standing up. The next night I made the bubbles bounce on the water, and he promptly sat down to catch them. The trouble was over. I am immensely grateful to the wise mother who suggested it, and pass on the tip for what it is worth."